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THE BISHOP WHITE PRAYER BOOK SOCIETY

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Most of the early history of the Bishop White Prayer Book Society has passed into obscurity many years ago. This is very largely due to the fact that no history of this Society has ever been written. Although this society has been in existence for almost 120 years, there is a very evident lack of recorded material pertaining to that existence. Of necessity, then, the chief sources for this paper have been the annual reports and minutes of the Society. Through them it has been possible to reconstruct some of the past events of this Society's long and valuable service to the Church all over the world.

Perhaps one of the reasons why so little has been written in relation to its history is that the Society has never been interested in publicizing itself for the purposes of self-praise or increasing its prestige. Rather, it is interested in making itself known solely to make everyone aware that its chief purpose is the free distribution of Prayer Books to all needy people and churches. If there is one thing that remains unchanged about the Society after all these years, it is its purpose to circulate the Prayer Book gratuitously to all who need and desire it, so far as its resources permit. Ever since its founding in 1834 by the Rt. Rev. William White, Bishop of Pennsylvania, this Society has quietly and efficiently prosecuted that task.

It is not surprising that the Society owes its origin and early guidance to the man whose name it bears in its title. This first Bishop of Pennsylvania was instrumental in the founding of

various societies and institutions during his episcopate. "The Bishop White Prayer Book Society was one of the many significant later undertakings of a man who has for many years built himself into the life of his times." ¹ While this is not a paper on the life of Bishop White, it is noteworthy to realize that he was also the founder of the Philadelphia Bible Society, which was the first such society in the country, the Sunday School Society, Episcopal Academy, the Philadelphia Dispensary, the Prison Reform Society, and the Magdalene Society. He also aided some of his clergy in organizing the Society for the Advancement of Christianity in Pennsylvania.

When considering the actual founding of the Bishop White Prayer Book Society, it is important to realize that one of the underlying causes which led to the organization of this and other similar societies was the rapid expansion of the missionary work in the Church during this period. More and more, during this first part of the nineteenth century, the Church in America was being awakened to its increasing responsibilities of spreading the Faith throughout the land. With the advent of this nineteenth century, there came an increased interest and zeal for the missionary work of the Church. The revival of missionary zeal in England was undoubtedly a contributory factor to this increased interest in the Church in America. Many societies, including our subject, came into being during this period with the aid of aiding and expanding the missionary work of the Church.

¹ Manross, William W., William White, A Sketch of the First Bishop of Pennsylvania: Philadelphia, Published by The Bishop White Prayer Book Society, 1934, p. 3.

One of the results of this movement was the successful effort of Bishop Griswold toward the founding of the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society in 1820. "The organization of a general missionary society was the most important single event in the history of the Episcopal Church in the early nineteenth century."¹ Since this Society was organized by General Convention in 1820, it was to be the general missionary society of the whole Church. Earlier than this, there had been organized a Society for the Advancement of Christianity in Pennsylvania under the leadership of Bishop White; this had occurred in 1812.

Other societies had also been formed to aid the various aspects of the Church's missionary task as a result of this movement in America. The very first movement for a Bible society to circulate the Holy Scriptures among the people in America came in 1808 from Philadelphia. Thus, the Bible Society of Philadelphia was organized in that year and became the first society of its kind in America. Although it was not confined to the Episcopal Church, since its Board of Managers included Presbyterians, Moravians, and Lutherans, as well as Churchmen, Bishop White became its first president.

The first successful and enduring Prayer Book society was the New York Bible and Common Prayer Book Society which was organized in 1809. It followed closely the example of the Bible Society of Philadelphia, proved by this notation found in its early minutes:

¹ Manross, William W., A History of the American Episcopal Church: New York, Morehouse-Gorham Co., 1950, p. 252

² Lowndes, Arthur, A Century of Achievement: New York, Morehouse-Gorham Co., 1909, Volume I, pp. 21 & 22

"In imitation of the Bible Society of Philadelphia, the Managers of the following Society are taken from the city of New York, for the obvious purpose of ensuring their ready and punctual cooperation. The benefits of this institution are designed to extend through the country, and we therefore recommend it to general patronage." ²

The founding of such institutions, then, tell the story of the times, how Churchmen throughout this early America were organizing various societies to aid and supplement the work of the Church as it began to expand throughout the land. Another such society, the Common Prayer Book Society of Pennsylvania, organized late in 1817, may be thought of as the fore-runner of the later Bishop White Prayer Book Society. This earlier Society was the fore-runner of the later one in the sense that it lasted only a few years, and it left behind a strong feeling of need for another such society to carry on that unfinished work of circulating the Prayer Book free of charge. Despite the relatively short time that the Common Prayer Book Society of Pennsylvania was in existence, the work of that society must have impressed upon the people of Philadelphia the fact that there was a great need for its work to continue. Its failure was due, not to a lack of interest or effort, but to a fire which consumed their stock of Prayer Books and probably their set of stereotype plates as well.

Following this severe setback, there was, for some unknown reason, no immediate effort to revive the Society or to form a similar one to take up the task. Nevertheless, the idea of such a Prayer Book society lived on and was later to manifest itself in the formation of two such societies, the Bishop White Prayer Book Society and the Female Protestant Episcopal Prayer Book Society.

This fact is clearly illustrated by the following excerpts from the first report of the Board of Managers to the annual meeting of May 22, 1834, which was held in St. Andrew's Church, Philadelphia:

"No attempt having been made to revive this Society (Common Prayer Book Society of Pennsylvania), up to the present time there has been no institution in this city and diocese expressly for the free distribution of our standards and formularies of devotion. ... Of late the question suggested itself to the minds of some members of the Church, why we had no Society for the distribution of the Prayer-book? Why was this useful field of Christian effort neglected? The subject was started in the annual Report of the Society for the Advancement of Christianity in Pennsylvania, read on Epiphany night; a Ladies Society was soon after formed and well patronized; at a public meeting held on the evening after the consecration of Bishop Otey, chiefly for the purpose of hearing an address from him, the usefulness of the Prayer-book, as a work for distribution, was brought very distinctly forward, and measures for supplying that prelate with any number that could be raised for distribution in his diocese, were suggested and afterwards successfully executed." ¹

These meetings mentioned above, as contained in the First Annual Report of the Bishop White Prayer Book Society, did much to bring to the attention of Churchmen in Philadelphia the growing need for a society to succeed the earlier one and pick up its work where it has been suspended. The results of these meetings held early in 1834 were as follows:

"The obvious effect of these circumstances was to lead to some combined and decisive action on the subject, and two or three meetings were held, at which several of the clergy and laity discussed the propriety of forming a society, and the shape and features of it; and the result of their deliberations was laid before a public meeting called for that purpose, when a constitution was adopted and officers chosen to carry it into effect. The interest manifested on the occasion, and the readiness with which the Society has been welcomed by our community, plainly indicate that we wanted but a defined plan of operations to unite the members of our Church in this cause. All we need is the blessing of the great Head of the Church, without which we can do nothing; that blessing we confidently look for, because that which we propose to do is for His glory, the increase of His Church, and the training of immortal souls for heaven." ²

¹ Bishop White Prayer Book Society, First Annual Report, Philadelphia: William Stavely, 1834, p. 5

² Ibid., p. 5

So we can see how the preparatory discussions and actions led to a public meeting called for the purpose of forming a Prayer Book society. The sincerity with which this Society hoped to accomplish its task, and the results which it intended from its free distribution of the Prayer Book are quite evident in the last sentence of the above quotation. This spirit of the Society, present at its founding, has persisted down through the years and is still evident today, just as it was then.

Perhaps it is best, at this point, to put forth my ideas concerning the actual date of the founding of the Bishop White Prayer Book Society. As I have continued my research on this Society in preparation for this paper, I have become increasingly aware that there exists, in the various sources, a discrepancy as to the date of the actual founding of this Society.

I have searched long and carefully through all the sources at my disposal, which, as far as I know, are the only pertinent ones in existence today, and I find that some sources state or imply that the date of its organization was 1833, while others record the date as being 1834. After careful consideration of the two possibilities, I feel that I am standing on reasonably firm ground when I state that the date of its founding and organization is February 18, 1834.

On the occasion of the 400th anniversary of The Book Of Common Prayer in 1949, the Society published a booklet with a very brief account of its beginnings. In this booklet the date of its founding is given as 1833. Also, in an article written to commemorate the centennial year of the Female Prayer Book Society, 1934, the

following excerpt from that article would certainly seem to imply that they considered the date of the Bishop White Prayer Book Society's founding to be 1833:

"This Society (Female) was described by the late Bishop Stevens at the commemoration of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Bishop White Prayer Book Society, as the 'sister society' of the latter. While the brother society is the elder by the short space of one year, both organizations in their outstanding service reflect a notable history of continuous and effective missionary work which has touched virtually every part of the world where the Church is preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom." ¹

This same article goes on to say that the Female Protestant Episcopal Prayer Book Society was organized on February 10, 1834. This certainly seems to agree with the statement in the First Annual Report by the Board of Managers to the first annual meeting of the Bishop White Society, in which they reported that "a Ladies Society" had been formed soon after that meeting of the Society for the Advancement of Christianity in Pennsylvania on Epiphany night, 1834. (This portion of that report has been already quoted on page 5).

Therefore, if this date of February 10, 1834 for the founding of the Female Prayer Book Society be a fact (and there is no reason to doubt it), and if the actual date of the founding of the Bishop White Prayer Book Society is February 18, 1834 (as I shall prove it is), then another obvious discrepancy appears on the scene. For this would put that portion of the article which is quoted above from The Church News in obvious error because of its reference to the Bishop White Society as the elder Society of the two, when, in view of the evidence, the Female Society would actually be the elder Society by the very short space of eight days.

¹ The Church News of the Diocese of Pennsylvania, Issue of February, 1934, pp. 152-3.

A look at the start of the First Annual Report is the first step in proving February 18, 1834 to be the real date of founding:

"The friends of the Bishop White Prayer-book Society are called together again, so soon after its organization, by a provision of the Constitution, fixing its annual meeting in the month of May." ¹

(This wording certainly implies a very recent organization.)

Another source which, after careful study, I find to lend weight to the date of February 18, 1834 as the organization of the Society is the Diocesan Journal of 1834. In the Diocesan Journal of 1833 there is no mention of the Society at all, but in one for 1834 the Society is mentioned by both Bishop White and his Assistant Bishop, H. U. Onderdonk, as follows:

"On the 18th of last February, there was organized, in this city, the Bishop White Prayer Book Society. There have been some contributions to its treasury; but the state of affairs in regard to money and business has produced delay in putting it into vigorous operation. It is confidently hoped, however, that it will, ere long, contribute largely to the prosperity and increase of the Church." (Bishop Onderdonk to the Diocesan Convention.)

"There has been instituted a Prayer Book Society, which, it is trusted, will have the effect of extending the estimation attached to that important volume."
(Bishop White's Address to the Diocesan Convention-1834.)

Still another source from which evidence can be drawn to support the Society's founding in 1834 comes from the Seventy-Fifth Anniversary Report as found in the Society's Minutes. These excerpts, I feel, are the most conclusive proof of all. For in recording there the event of Bishop Otey's consecration, which we can definitely prove to have taken place on January 14th, 1834, there can be no doubt as to the accuracy of these details which follow:

"We would gratefully review the important step taken in 1834 when this Bishop White Prayer Book Society was founded.

¹ First Annual Report, op. cit., p. 5

"On the 14th of January that year Bishop Otey, having just been consecrated here (Philadelphia) to be the shepherd of the scattered flock in the then remote region of Tennessee, made an address concerning his new field, and spoke of the importance of the Prayer Book in such a missionary undertaking; Dr. DeLancey in the discussion that followed expressed the thought that a Society for distributing it as a tract would do good; others agreeing, a meeting was held on the 6th of February at the house of William H. Newbold and arrangements were made for holding a public meeting at once in Christ Church. This was the year before the great principle was enunciated that every baptized member is a member of the General Missionary Society--a proclamation which affected greatly the life of the Church in this country. The meeting (at Christ Church) was convened on the evening of the 18th of February; the congregation was unusually large." ¹

Therefore, on the basis of the evidence submitted from these various sources, I feel that there can be no doubt as to the date of February 18, 1834 as being the actual date on which the Bishop White Prayer Book Society was founded and organized in that meeting at Old Christ Church, Philadelphia. Although there may have been some discussion and interest in the possibility of such a society during the latter part of 1833, there is no definite evidence of any kind to show that any organized movement was set up to reach such a goal. While I have pointed out earlier that there had always been some interest among Churchmen in this area towards a future successor to the Common Prayer Book Society of Pennsylvania, it is quite evident that such increasing interest did not culminate in any organized movement for that purpose until early in 1834.

Note: There are quite a few references to the date of 1834 as the founding of the Society to be found in various Annual Reports, a few of which are the 9th, 15th, 21st, and 30th.

¹ Minute Book of the Bishop White Prayer Book Society, (For the period covering 1902 to 1925), pp. 111 & 112.

Two apparently common misconceptions, then, have been brought to light and corrected as a result of this careful survey of the origins of the Bishop White Prayer Book Society. First, the founding and organization of this Society must be dated on February 16, 1834 instead of the year 1833 as previously supposed. Secondly, this Society is not older than the Female Protestant Prayer Book Society, as many seem to have assumed, but it is actually eight days younger than its "sister" Society. On the basis of the available material at hand, I feel that these two facts are firmly supported by the contents thereof.

Before taking up the history of the Society from the date of its founding down through the years, I would like to put forth, what I consider to be, a reasonable explanation for the emergence of that misconception about the date of its founding. Unless one looks carefully into what the Society meant by the terms, First Annual Report, Second Annual Report, etc., it is quite easy to become confused and assume that when the Society presented its First Annual Report on May 22, 1834, it 'must' have been in existence for one full year prior to that date; and so on down through the years.

This is where the mistake is made, and this is what I feel was the cause of the common misconception, since one full year prior to May of 1834 would certainly have placed the founding in 1833. However, such was not the case with this Society's First Annual Report! When the Constitution was formed in February of 1834 at the meeting of its organization, it clearly stipulated that there was to be an annual meeting of the Society held each May (no reason is given why this month was chosen for that meeting), to which meeting

a report was to be made by the Board.* Therefore, by order of its Constitution, the First Annual Report was given to the first annual meeting of that Society which naturally occurred during the first May following its founding, even though that first annual meeting on May 22, 1834 was only three months after its founding! This was clearly their intended procedure, and we can readily understand why it later became confusing.

That this seemingly strange procedure was intended is proved by analyzing various Annual Reports of the Society to see how they have designated the time element in relation to the Society's work. For example, when the Society is recording its distribution of Prayer Books in its Fifteenth Annual Report presented on May 17, 1848, it states:

"During the fourteen years of its existence, 'The Bishop White Prayer Book Society' has distributed Prayer Books to the following dioceses and objects." ¹

Notice that while this is the Fifteenth Annual Report of the Society, they state their existence in terms of fourteen full years. This is due to the fact, as previously mentioned, that within those fourteen years they have convened actually fifteen annual meetings, the first one in May of 1834 down to the fifteenth one in May of 1848. Again, it is quite understandable how much confusion could result later from such a procedure.

Having thus established the date of the Society's founding and organization, let us now turn to a more detailed account of the proceedings of that meeting in Christ Church on February 18, 1834. Since the original minutes of that meeting, so far as anyone knows, are no longer in existence, we must depend almost entirely upon the

* See Appendix A---Article VI of the Constitution.

¹ Fifteenth Annual Report of the Bishop White Prayer Book Society, Philadelphia: King & Baird, 1848, p. 9

Seventy-Fifth Anniversary Report which gives us a valuable insight of that first meeting:

"The venerable Bishop White, at this time in his eighty-sixth year, presided and explained the purposes before them; the Assistant Bishop, Dr. Onderdonk, congratulated his Reverend Father in the Lord, the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States, and American Christians generally on the occasion as one pregnant alike with beneficial consequences to them all; asserting that the sentiment with them that next to the Bible the Prayer Book was the most popular religious book in the world, and that next to the distribution of the Holy Scriptures and the sending forth of the Missionaries of the Cross, there is no mean which will be productive of so great an amount of good, and that too at so cheap a rate, as the discreet giving away of this volume." ¹

Following these introductory remarks giving the importance of the Prayer Book and the need for its distribution, the meeting continued, Bishop White presiding. Dr. G.T. Bedell, who was made the Third Vice-President of the Society formed that evening, supplemented those remarks by stating that the Prayer Book is one of the "continuing excellencies" of the Church, and that to it is due the Church's remarkable exemption from false doctrine, heresy, and schism.

Dr. Nead, elected to the Board of Managers, pointed out that Episcopalians have a more imperative obligation in this field of missionary work because of their possession of such a beautiful and valuable Liturgy as found in the Prayer Book, than the other Christian bodies have. He stressed the importance of their support in the work which this Society was about to undertake.

As we view the words of the Corresponding Secretary, the Rev. J.W. James, at that meeting, we find another substantiation of the fact that the Female Prayer Book Society was actually formed prior to this Society:

¹ Minute Book of the Bishop White Prayer Book Society, (For the period covering 1902 through 1925) p. 112.

"The Rev. Mr. James called for the appointment of a committee to report a Constitution and nominate officers, and paid a merited tribute to the ladies for the zeal and activity which they had displayed in already forming a Society for the purpose of distributing the Prayer Book among their own sex." ¹

Therefore, the date of February 10, 1834, considered to be the Female Society's founding, is certainly upheld in the light of this testimony.

The fact that Bishop Doane of New Jersey was present at this meeting in Christ Church shows that there was more than just a mere localized interest in the formation of such a society for the gratuitous distribution of Prayer Books. The record reports his action at this meeting as this:

"Bishop G. W. Doane moved and spoke to the resolution that the free circulation of the Prayer Book is one of the principal means of promoting the cause of religion and the Church, and that the destitution of many parts of our Atlantic States and the rising dioceses of the West constitute an appeal which should awaken the sympathies and call forth the liberality of Episcopalians."²

Following these remarks by Bishop Doane, the floor was given to Mr. Wm. H. Newbold, in whose home the preliminary meeting of Feb. 6th was held to arrange for this public meeting in Christ Church. Mr. Newbold was a member of the first Board of Managers of the Society and devoted much of his time in helping the Society to become a successful reality. Of his action at this public meeting on February 18, 1834, the following is recorded:

"Mr. Newbold submitted and dwelt upon the resolution that the clergy of the several churches in the city and county of Philadelphia be respectfully requested to take such measures as may make their respective congregations fully informed of the existence, objects and merits of this Society and excite and continue a warm interest in its behalf."³

¹ (Minute Book of the Society), Ibid., p. 113.

² Ibid., p. 113

³ Ibid., p. 113

In addition, Dr. Littell, the Recording Secretary, proposed a resolution which urged that a committee be appointed for each church in the city and county of Philadelphia to call on every member of each, and to solicit the subscription and influence of each one.

These excerpts, then, are some of the high lights of that meeting of February 18, 1834, in old Christ Church which marked the founding of the Bishop White Prayer Book Society under the capable leadership of Pennsylvania's first Bishop, The Rt. Rev. Wm. White.*

In the words of the Seventy-Fifth Anniversary Report concerning these events which I have related, "such was the auspicious launching of this benevolent enterprise, and through all the long years that have elapsed since, the Society has quietly but efficiently prosecuted its task." With this thought in mind, I will now devote the rest of this paper to a condensed consideration of the work of the Society down through the years, giving some of the more interesting events in connection with its distribution of Prayer Books and Hymnals all over the world.

Following the founding of the Society, the next step was to call its existence to the attention of the Churchmen in order to gain their support and interest. If this new Society was to succeed in its high and beneficent aims, the support of Episcopalians was imperative indeed. At a meeting of the Board of Managers which followed shortly after the Society's organizational meeting, it was resolved:

That for the purpose of promoting the objects of this Society, a Committee be appointed to prepare an address to Episcopalians, setting forth the advantages likely to be derived by the Church, from an united and vigorous effort in this enterprise." ¹

* NOTE: For a complete list of the Society's first Officers and Managers, see APPENDIX B.

¹ Address of the Board of Managers of the Bishop White Prayer Book Society with the Constitution and By-Laws, Philadelphia: Jasper Harding, 1834, p. 2

The address called for by this resolution was soon printed in pamphlet form and distributed among Churchmen everywhere. This address announced the founding of the Society, described its objects, and solicited the aid of all who read it. Mention of this address was made in the annual meeting of the Society in 1834, and the financial receipts for the first three months of the Society's existence must have come in part, at least, from the effects of that address to the Churchmen. In that First Annual Report of May, 1834, the Treasurer reports the receipt of \$399.50 in cash, while pointing out that other subscriptions made during this period of three months were not yet paid. This was enough to start the Society on its mission. Besides being the Society's first president, Bishop White was also its first patron. The Society provided in its Constitution (See Appendix A) that the payment of fifty dollars at any one time constituted a patron, and the sum of twenty-five dollars given at any one time constituted a member for life, with the right of membership in both cases.

It is important to point out here another of the enduring characteristics of the Bishop White Prayer Book Society. This is the fact that the scope of its work was never intended to be a limited one; nor has it ever been. While the Society was organized in Philadelphia, and the officers drawn from the city and county of Philadelphia, and though most of its financial support came from that area, it was not intended to be a mere diocesan organization which distributed Prayer Books within that area only. This point is emphasized again and again in the annual reports of the Society, as just two of the examples show here:

"In such a cause as we have undertaken, we are allowed to feel that our field is the world. The Prayer Book should go along with the Cross, wherever that is carried to victory. Now that Christianity is planting everywhere in our own and distant lands, our object becomes of incalculable and greatly increasing importance." ¹

"The Bishop White Prayer Book Society, as is well known, though originating in Philadelphia, managed by members of our Church residing here, and under the superintendence of our Bishop, is not limited in her operations to a supply of the wants of our own Diocese; but so far as her means will permit, endeavours to meet those of the destitute sections of our widely extended country. Nor indeed does she confine herself altogether even to this field, but scatters abroad among foreign lands the treasures of her storehouse." ²

This universal missionary spirit, which characterized the founders of the Society, has remained with the Society down through the years to the present day.

Also, it is significant to note that the first five hundred Prayer Books to be distributed by the Society in this first year went to the States of Kentucky (200), Tennessee (100), Illinois (100), Alabama (50), and the Territory of Florida (50). In keeping with its intended object, these Prayer Books were distributed gratuitously in each case.

By the time the Third Annual Report was issued in 1836, the Society had already distributed almost 8,000 Prayer Books, and the desires of the quotation above had been realized. For prior to May of 1836, the Society had sent 115 copies to American Episcopal missionaries in China for distribution there and 200 copies to Rio de Janeiro in compliance with an application from one of our Navy chaplains, the Rev. Addison Searle, for distribution among

¹ First Annual Report, op. cit., p. 10

² Seventh Annual Report of the Bishop White Prayer Book Society, Philadelphia: King and Baird, 1840, p. 6

the crews of vessels there. It is also interesting to note that 100 books were sent to Ohio for distribution on the boats on the Ohio and Erie Canal; an equal amount was sent to Virginia for use on the steamers navigating the Ohio River there. Such were the early days of the Society in their task of circulating the Prayer Book wherever and whenever possible.

There was another circumstance by the time of this Third Annual Report of the Society which was highly undesirable, and that was the lack of funds in its treasury. As is so often the case where an institution has to depend almost entirely upon the contributions of people for the execution of its purpose, the interest of many people in the Society seems to have waned once its initial start was accomplished. Whereas the Society's treasury showed a surplus at each of the first two annual meetings, by the time of this third annual meeting, the surplus had vanished and a deficit had appeared instead. The following portion of that report to the Society was to become a common situation in many succeeding years of the Society's existence, and which gave birth to many urgent pleas by the Society for more funds to adequately continue its task:

"Our finances are at present much embarrassed; the treasury is not only exhausted, but there is actually a deficiency of several hundred dollars, and unless funds are promptly contributed, the Society will be compelled to pause in its career of usefulness, at the very moment when a more extended sphere is presented for its action, and when it is better prepared to operate efficiently than at any period since its formation." ¹

¹ Third Annual Report of the Bishop White Prayer Book Society,
Philadelphia: J. Van Court, 1836, p. 4

While the support of Episcopalians and their churches seems to have come to the rescue of the Society in spurts, it was still just enough, in these early years, to keep the Society from closing its doors. The situation did not improve in an equal ratio with the increasing rate of distribution that the Society was striving for. With the issuing of the Seventh Annual Report in 1840, there was inserted this plea by the Board of Managers:

"The Board of Managers of the Bishop White Prayer Book Society, in view of the exhausted condition of the Treasury, and of their inability to supply the increasing demand for Prayer Books, would suggest to Episcopalians the following query:

What have I done during the past year to aid in circulating that book which I prize so highly as a fruitful source of spiritual guidance and comfort, and which is acknowledged by nearly all intelligent Christians to be the best formulary of devotion, and next to the Bible in importance for general circulation." ¹

There is not nearly enough time or space to relate many other interesting exhortations for funds by the Society which can be found in the annual reports and minutes of that body. Suffice it to say that, as late as last year, the applications received by the Society were greater than the funds it possessed to grant all of them.

Before going on to a consideration of the later years of the Society, I should like to submit the following excerpts from early journals of the Diocese of Pennsylvania to show how Bishop Underdonk, as an officer of the Society, was always careful to include a reference to the work of the Society in his annual address to the Diocesan Convention:

¹ Seventh Annual Report, op. cit., p. 2 (Insert)

"The Bishop White Prayer Book Society has circulated a good number of copies of the Liturgy, and is about making a further effort to procure the means of increasing usefulness." ¹ (May 19, 1835)

"Allow me to commend to the notice and patronage of the diocese, the Bishop White Prayer Book Society. With a calm but persevering energy, it has, within the two years of its existence, distributed about 8,000 copies of the Liturgy, sending them throughout our State, our country, and to foreign climes, to awaken the careless, to comfort the lowly, to reclaim the erring, to win the disaffected, and to guide the devotion of the family and the public altar. Let not such an institution be forgotten in the contributions we make to the cause of the Redeemer. Its annual meeting will be held this evening." ² (May 18, 1836)

"I again commend to the patronage of the diocese the Bishop White Prayer Book Society, which is still engaged in circulating thousands of copies of our inestimable manual of devotion." ³ (May 17, 1837)

"Its management is necessarily local; yet it was not designed to be either a local or a diocesan institution, but as general and diffusive in its action as the contributions would permit." ⁴ (May 16, 1838)

While these remarks may seem unimportant in themselves, it is evident that they did much toward reviving the interest of many Churchmen as well as their renewed support, which was of such vital importance to the Society.

A note of humor appears in the Tenth Annual Report of the Society with the remarks presented prior to the financial report:

"A collection was afterwards taken up, amounting to \$85.00 and one gold pencil-case." ⁵

- ¹ Journal of the Diocese of Pennsylvania, 1835, Bishop's Address.
- ² Journal of the Diocese of Pennsylvania, 1836, Bishop's Address.
- ³ Journal of the Diocese of Pennsylvania, 1837, Bishop's Address.
- ⁴ Journal of the Diocese of Pennsylvania, 1838, Bishop's Address.
- ⁵ Tenth Annual Report of the Bishop White Prayer Book Society, Philadelphia: King and Baird, 1843, p. 3

During the years that followed Bishop White's death on July 17, 1836, each successive bishop of the Diocese of Pennsylvania became the President, ex-officio, of the Society in keeping with its original intention for that office. Likewise, the work of the Society was continued and increased in conjunction with its original object of the gratuitous circulation of the Prayer Book. During the many years of its existence, it has sent Prayer Books into every part of the United States and the rest of the world.

At the end of the first seventy-five years of its existence in 1909, the Society was able to report that it had distributed, since 1834, a grand total of 561,902 Prayer Books and 178,970 Hymnals. It is impossible to even begin to estimate what such a distribution has accomplished for the extension of the Church and the Kingdom through all these "missionaries". There are hundreds of letters published in the annual reports and minutes of the Society expressing deep and sincere gratitude to the Society for the invaluable worth of the Prayer Books they have circulated. To give only one example, here is what one of our clergymen related after having expressed his deepest gratitude for the copies sent to him by the Society:

"Scarcely a day passes but some pleasing evidence is afforded of the usefulness of the Prayer Book. Returning home on one occasion at a very late hour, I stopped at the door of a small dwelling to inquire my way. Instead of replying to my question, a voice in the dark eagerly asked if I was the Church Minister? Responding in the affirmative, an elderly woman immediately brought out a light, and I recognized in her a person to whom, a few days before, I had given a Prayer Book at a funeral. Her latent affections for the Church had been awakened by its perusal, and she now requested that I would baptize her two grandchildren, which was accordingly done on the following Sunday.

"Not long since, I visited a miner on his death-bed; he had been a communicant of the Church in the north of Ireland: I left a Prayer Book with him, and was soon after applied to for others, by three of his neighbours. They were Church people from Yorkshire, and had a number of children; several of whom now attend the Sunday School from a distance of more than four miles.

"On several occasions it has afforded me an opportunity of showing the relationship of the Episcopal Church with the Church of England.... Many who have been in the habit of frequenting the meeting houses of the Dissenters, I find are Church people, and only require opportunity and invitation to lead them back to the fold from whence they have strayed. The Prayer Book is an important means of accomplishing all this." ¹

Of course, this is but one example where the Society's work of putting the Prayer Book into the hands of many people who would not otherwise become acquainted with it, has done much for the extension of Christianity all over the world. When instances such as these are reported to the Society, it can see the far-reaching effects of its work, but much of its good has gone unnoticed.

Before closing this paper, I should like to consider briefly the more important events of the past few years of the Society. During the last two World Wars, the Society has supplied our servicemen with thousands of copies of the Prayer Book for Servicemen. Many Prayer Books and Journals in the combined form, which this Society originated the printing and distribution of, were circulated as well. In 1943 arrangements were made on the S.S. Gripsholm, sailing from New York to Japan to exchange some prisoners of war, to ship 300 Prayer Books from the Society to our men over there. "Space on the Gripsholm was extremely limited and it was the hope that she would be able to touch at a number of points in Japan so that the books could be widely distributed." ²

¹ Fourth Annual Report of the Bishop White Prayer Book Society,
Philadelphia: J. Van Court, 1837, pp. 8 & 9

² Minutes of the Bishop White Prayer Book Society, (For the period
covering Oct. 1943 to present) p. 6

The Bishop White Prayer Book Society also has available today portions of the Prayer Book in Braille for use by the blind. It has put forth and sent out translations of the Prayer Book in several languages; German, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish to name them, as well as special Manuals in the Dakota tongue.

Dr. Allen Evans, the present Secretary of the Society, recently informed me that, hereafter, the Prayer Books distributed by the Society will be published by the Oxford University Press instead of by the Church Hymnal Corporation. This latter company will continue to publish those Hymnals for distribution by the Society. The Prayer Books will be bound in red and the Hymnals in blue-black. Each will have seal of the Bishop White Prayer Book Society on the leaf, which is a popular silhouette of Bishop White, and that seal will show the Society's affiliation with the Female Prayer Book Society. This affiliation of the two Societies, discussed for many years, has just this year culminated in the official Agreement of Affiliation (See APPENDIX C). The affiliation of these two Societies should do much to enhance the distribution of Prayer Books and Hymnals because of their combined efforts. For just as in the early days of the Society, there is still, too often, a larger demand for distribution than the funds available will allow. This affiliation should go a long way towards reducing that difficulty. Moreover, it is, in one sense, perfectly natural for these two Societies to affiliate since they are both working with the same object, and also since the one was founded by Bishop White, and his granddaughter was instrumental in the founding of the Female Society.

At the present time, the Bishop White Prayer Book Society asks for, but does not insist on, the payment by the recipient of the shipping charges of the Prayer Books and Annals sent. Its present funds come almost entirely from the income on the Endowment Fund, with a minority of the sums used coming from donations and the shipping charges that are paid by the recipient. The Society holds two stated meetings each year, one in the Spring and one in the Fall. More can be called when the occasion demands it.

Perhaps the best way to conclude such a study of the Society is to do so by quoting Bishop Onderdonk's testimony to Bishop White, as its President, after his death in 1836:

"Through his influence, more perhaps than any other individual, the Prayer Book has come down to us with so few alterations beyond what were necessary to adapt it to the changes which had been effected in our civil and ecclesiastical relations; and there was, therefore, a propriety, independently of other considerations, in adopting his name - itself the emblem of purity - as the distinctive appellation of our Society. He presided at every anniversary except the last, and always evinced an earnest desire for the free distribution of our formularies of devotion. Long may the Society, founded under such auspices, exist and flourish, at once a monument to his memory, and an instrument in diffusing that pure and undefiled religion of which he was so conspicuous an example."¹

¹ Fourth Annual Report, op. cit., p. 5

APPENDIX A

(Original Constitution of The Bishop White Prayer Book Society)

CONSTITUTION

ARTICLE I: This Society shall be called "THE BISHOP WHITE PRAYER BOOK SOCIETY." Its object shall be the circulation of the Prayer-book within this diocese, and also wheresoever the Society may deem it expedient.

ARTICLE II: This Society shall consist of all Episcopalians residing in the City or County of Philadelphia who pay annually such sum as shall be appointed by the Board of Managers, into its Treasury. The contribution of twenty-five dollars at any one time shall constitute a member for life; and a contribution of fifty dollars at any one time shall constitute a patron, with the rights of membership in both cases. All donations and legacies shall be received by the Treasurer, and applied to the objects of the Society, who shall cause a record to be kept and published of such benefactors. Subscriptions shall fall due on the day of the annual meeting of the Society.

ARTICLE III: Churches out of the City and County of Philadelphia may form auxiliaries to contribute to the funds of this Society.

ARTICLE IV: The officers of this Society shall be a President, five Vice-Presidents, a Treasurer, a Corresponding Secretary, Recording Secretary, and thirty-five Managers, Clergymen, and Laymen, residing in the City and County of Philadelphia, (at least ten of the clergymen, if there be so many, being settled in parishes,) who together shall form a board, to which shall be entrusted the transaction of the business of the Society, and the care of its funds. Five members, including the President, or a Vice-President, shall form a quorum. The Officers of the Society shall be ex-officio the officers of the Board. The Bishop of the diocese shall be ex-officio the President of the Society; and the Assistant Bishop, if there be one, shall be, ex-officio, the first Vice-President. The other officers and managers shall be appointed at the annual meeting of the Society, a plurality of votes deciding the election. Provided, that if there be no election, the officers and managers shall continue in office until their successors be appointed. The Board shall have power to fill any vacancies which may occur in their body.

ARTICLE V: The Board shall meet within ten days of their appointment, and shall hold stated meetings four times in each year, and adjourned meetings when necessary. Special meetings shall be called by the President, or in case of absence or sickness, by the senior Vice-President, when occasion may in his opinion require; or whenever he shall receive from any three members of the Board a request to that effect in writing, stating the object of such meeting, regular notice being given to all the members of the Board.

ARTICLE VI: There shall be an annual meeting of the Society, held in the city of Philadelphia, in the month of May, on such day as the Board shall fix, to which meeting a report shall be made by the Board, of its proceedings during the previous year, with a view of the state of the treasury, and such appropriate information as may be interesting and useful to the Society.

ARTICLE VII: This Constitution shall not be altered except by a vote of two-thirds of the members present at an annual meeting, or at a special meeting of the Society, called for that purpose by the Board, who shall have power to call special meetings of the Society, with the concurrence of the President and three Vice-Presidents of the same.

Note: Copies of this original Constitution of the Society can be found in the back of the First Annual Report of the Society issued in 1834. This report is on file at the Historical Society and at the Church House.

Another copy can also be found in the Address of the Board Of Managers of the Bishop White Prayer Book Society, which was published by Jesper Harding in 1834. This pamphlet is on file at the headquarters of the Society, 319 Lombard St., Philadelphia.

APPENDIX B

(Copy of the Officers and Managers of the Bishop White Prayer Book Society in 1834, as found in the Society's First Annual Report of 1834).

OFFICERS

President, ex-officio.
Rt. Rev. Bishop White, D.D.

First Vice-President, ex-officio.
Rt. Rev. Bishop H. U. Onderdonk, D.D.

Second Vice-President
Rev. W.H. De Lancey

Third Vice-President
Rev. G.T. Bedell

Fourth Vice-President
Hon. Horace Binney

Fifth Vice-President
John Andrews, Esq.

Corresponding Secretary
Rev. J.W. James

Recording Secretary
Dr. S. Littell

Treasurer
Mr. William Musgrave

MANAGERS

Rev. Wm. Cooper Mead, D.D.
Rev. S. H. Tyng, D.D.
Rev. J. C. Clay,
Rev. George Boyd,
Rev. John Rodney,
Rev. George Sheets,
Rev. H. J. Morton,
Rev. C. F. Cruse,
Rev. Robert Piggot,
Rev. James Wiltbank,
Rev. William Bryant,
Rev. C. M. Dupuy,
Rev. P. Van Pelt,
Rev. Samuel C. Brinckle,
James S. Smith, Esq.,
Mr. William Chaloner,
James C. Biddle, Esq.,

Dr. Caspar Morris,
Mr. Lewis R. Ashurst,
Dr. William Keith,
Mr. Joseph S. Riley,
Mr. William H. Newbold,
Mr. Andrew Summers,
Mr. Samuel N. Davies,
Mr. Samuel Wagner,
Mr. John Welsh, Jr.,
Mr. Wm. H. Wayne,
Mr. Jacob Ashburner,
Mr. John S. Littell,
Dr. W. D. Brinckle,
Mr. James M. Aertsen,
Mr. William Welsh,
Mr. John D. George,
Mr. John G. Clark.

APPENDIX C

(Copy of Agreement of Affiliation of the Bishop White Prayer Book Society and the Female Protestant Episcopal Prayer Book Society.)

THIS AGREEMENT, made this 9th day of February, 1953, between the FEMALE PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL PRAYER BOOK SOCIETY, a corporation of the State of Pennsylvania, hereinafter called the Female Society, party of the first part, and the BISHOP WHITE PRAYER BOOK SOCIETY, hereinafter called the Bishop White Society, party of the second part,

WITNESSETH:

WHEREAS, each of the parties hereto is engaged in the purchase and distribution of Prayer Books; and

WHEREAS, the Female Society, from time to time, has more funds than the cost of purchasing and distributing the Prayer Books for which applications have been received; and

WHEREAS, the Bishop White Society has, from time to time, applications for more Prayer Books than can be purchased and distributed with the funds available to it; and

WHEREAS, the parties hereto desire to affiliate each with the other for the purpose of effecting a more efficient distribution of Prayer Books;

NOW, THEREFORE, the parties hereto do covenant and agree as follows:

1. All income of the Female Society in excess of that necessary for the current administrative needs of said Society shall periodically be paid over to the Bishop White Society, provided, however, that all funds in the Special Fund and principal fund of the Female Society shall be retained by the said society.

2. The investments in the Principal Fund of the Female Society shall be subject to periodic review by the Finance Committee of the Bishop White Society. The Female Society shall appoint an Investment Advisor and whenever the said Committee desires to review the said investments, the Committee shall notify the said Advisor of the time and place of its meeting and the Advisor shall be allowed to attend the meeting. Thereupon the Committee shall advise the Treasurer of the Female Society as to its investments and re-investments.

3. The Female Society shall turn over to the Bishop White Society all applications for Prayer Books recieved by the former, and the latter agrees to fill such applications as it seems worthy and for which funds are available.

4. The Bishop White Society agrees to apply such funds as may be turned over to it by the Female Society solely to the purchase and distribution of Prayer Books for which applications have been received either directly or through the Female Society as hereinabove provided, and the Bishop White Society shall render annual accounts to the Female Society of all funds received from the latter.

5. Each of the parties hereto shall have, at all times, the right to examine the accounts of the other.

6. The Bishop White Society shall make appropriate changes in its letterhead and in its advertising material so as to show the affiliation of the Female Society with the Bishop White Society.

7. Upon nomination by the Female Society, the Bishop White Society shall elect two members of its Board to represent the Female Society thereon. They shall have the right to participate in all deliberations, to vote on all motions and to be treated in every way as the other members of the Board.

8. Each of the parties hereto will endeavor, from time to time, to improve its cooperation with the other.

9. Each of the parties hereto shall have the right to terminate this Agreement by one year's notice to the other.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the parties hereto have duly caused this Agreement to be executed, in duplicate, on the authority of their respective Boards.

THE FEMALE PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL PRAYER BOOK SOCIETY

By Marion M. Slemons President

Attest: Martha W. Fuller Recording Secretary

THE BISHOP WHITE PRAYER BOOK SOCIETY

By Oliver J. Hart President

Attest: Allen Evans Secretary of the Board

NOTE: This Agreement of Affiliation is on file at the headquarters of both the Bishop White Society and the Female Society.